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AUTHOR	Layman, Traci Arbogast; O'Neal, Thelma Lucille
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ABSTRACT

Early childhood educators are concerned with the most effective method of integrating whole language and phonics to maximize emergent literacy skills. In kindergarten, it is especially important to provide the students with a variety of institutional approaches to accommodate different learning styles. A study examined the effectiveness of Super Sounds, a phonics program that is incorporated into a whole language curriculum. Subjects were 41 students from two kindergarten classes in an elementary school who were tested individually; the testing period was 2 weeks. The first assessment involved the students' ability to identify the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they produce. The second assessment targeted initial letter recognition, using a list of words featuring letters and sounds of the alphabet. The assessment also used three digraphs that are studied in the Super Sounds program. Results indicated that Super Sounds is a successful tool in developing students' phonemic awareness when used in conjunction with a whole language curriculum. (Contains 16 references; four graphs of study results and seven teacher interview transcripts are appended.) (Author/CR)

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ED 416 445

An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Super Sounds Program

Traci Arbogast Layman
Thelma Lucille O'Neal

Spring 1996

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

Early childhood educators are concerned with the most effective method of integrating whole language and phonics to maximize emergent literacy skills. In Kindergarten, it is especially important to provide the students with a variety of instructional approaches to accommodate different learning styles. This study evaluates the effectiveness of Super Sounds, a phonics program that is incorporated into a whole language curriculum. Assessments were designed to measure students' ability to recognize letter-sound relationships. Results suggest that Super Sounds is a successful tool in developing students' phonemic awareness when used in conjunction with a whole language curriculum.

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Introduction

During our teaching associateships at Hollymead Elementary School, we were introduced to a phonics program entitled "Super Sounds" that was being implemented in Kindergarten classrooms. At Hollymead, Kindergarten teachers use Super Sounds to integrate phonics into a whole language curriculum. The debate over whole language or phonics as the ideal reading instruction method has become a major concern for early childhood educators. We were aware of the controversy as we entered the classroom; therefore, the issue was of particular interest to us. Throughout our teaching associateships, we had the opportunity to both witness and team teach Super Sounds in a whole language classroom. The Super Sounds program attempts to bridge the gap between whole language and phonics instruction. As a result of our experience, we decided to evaluate the effectiveness of the Super Sounds program as an integration of whole language and phonics.

Whole Language

One of the more intriguing aspects of early childhood education is literacy development. Today, teachers have more flexibility in choosing and implementing methods of reading instruction. One method that is widely used throughout America's schools is the whole language approach. DeChant (1993) believes "that there may be as many manifestations of whole language instruction as there are teachers" (p. 5). Whole language is a belief system that cannot simply be mandated within a class or school system. Therefore, anyone wanting to implement whole language needs to understand and live the philosophy or belief (Henke & Weaver, 1992). Whole language advocates believe that it should not be defined too narrowly. It is not simply a teaching technique, a method, or a strategy.

Although there is no one set definition of whole language, there are many principles that together form a core of beliefs that characterize the philosophy. A central notion is that children learn language by using it to express their ideas and accomplish meaningful tasks, like finding out what a story is about. Learning is not accomplished by practicing separate skills such as looking for vowels or memorizing definitions of parts of speech (Stanek, 1993). Words, sentences, poems, and stories are left whole. This allows children to learn by making connections in the same way that adults do. Whole language is also based on the assumption that children learn differently and therefore should be given the opportunity to acquire knowledge in many different ways. Writing stories, drawing pictures, making oral presentations,

acting out plots, rhyming, and talking for puppets are only some of the activities that stem from the stories that children read.

In a whole language classroom, instruction is no longer centered around the teacher doing something to or at children. Rather, it manifests itself in a cooperative learning environment focusing on child-centered activities (DeCarlo, 1995). This focus is reflected in the layout of a whole language classroom. It is, in fact, different from the traditional classroom. It becomes somewhat of a comfort zone. One is apt to find bathtubs filled with pillows where children can curl up with their favorite books, desks that have been pushed aside and replaced with large pillows, reading lofts, round tables and chairs, bean-bag chairs, and old couches. One can also find large carpeted areas that have been designated as reading centers. The walls, windows, and ceilings quickly become the home for students' writings and art work. The whole language classroom is also literature based and print based. There are big books, children's literature books, books of poetry, magazines, posters, and phone books lining the room. One is also likely to find mailboxes, message boards, shelves, and various objects, all of which are clearly labeled (DeChant, 1993). A physical setting such as this creates both an academic and a social environment. They are both extremely important in the reading process. Such a classroom also suggests that the children have been read to and have experienced reading and possibly writing.

For many teachers, one of the more difficult aspects to accept about whole language education is the idea that reading and writing emerge as a

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natural part of a child's growth and development (Raines, 1995). Some still believe that children will emerge as listeners and speakers without specific instruction, but that reading and writing must be taught. Today, however, research has shown a clear correlation between writing and reading and the benefits of combining the two (DeChant, 1993). Learning to read is reinforced by writing, and learning to write is reinforced by reading. DeChant (1993) also believes that children learn writing by engaging in a "meaning-centered exploration with written language" (p. 75), which is experienced in the whole language approach. Furthermore, whole language programs promote the integration of writing and reading instruction.

Whole language programs advocate "the use of materials that are predictable, natural, relevant, and interesting" (DeChant, 1993, p. 70). As a result, there are many strategies and components that are common practices. One example is the Language Experience Approach (LEA) developed in 1943 by Lee and Lamoreau in Learning to Read Through Experience. Lee and Lamoreau realized that many children come to Kindergarten knowing how to read their names and reading or recognizing road signs or store names. The LEA expands on this knowledge. This approach capitalizes on children's language, experience, and knowledge. In essence, children develop their own text based on their own experience. It transforms a child's spoken language into print. From this, children learn that sounds can be put into written form and that the beginning, middle, and ending sounds can be graphically symbolized. It develops sight vocabulary, left-to-right direction in reading, and letter-sound

correspondences. More importantly, it contains words and meanings that the child wants to know and is interested in.

Another strategy of whole language is utilizing literature-based reading. In this type of program, children's literature provides much of the reading content. The program also prides itself on using authentic texts. Authenticity is defined as "the degree to which the physical, social, and emotional environment supports a writer in creating purposeful text for a specific audience" (Manning, Manning & Wortman, 1991, p.54). In other words, authentic materials represent a variety of situational contexts. Materials such as big books, rhymes, poems, songs, plays, recipes, menus, labels, and bulletin boards, are only a few examples. In the last decade, the popularity of commercially made big books has increased, and every major book publisher reproduces popular children's books in the big book format. Another means of manipulating this strategy is through shared reading. More specifically, "the teacher uses enlarged texts to recreate the bedtime story situation. In this way, the teacher and a group of students can share the same story," (Manning, Manning, & Wortman, 1991, p. 54). It is also used to approximate the experience of lap reading. When a child sits on the lap of an adult, he or she experiences print and the illustrations through a close-up view of the print. For example, the adult often points out key features of the print and of the pictures. "See, that word starts with an *R*, just like your name, Robert. That's an *R*." Or the adult might say: "Show me where to start reading," or "What do you think this page might be about?" (Raines, 1995, p.23). Interjections such as this will

help the child get a grasp of how the print works and how to make sense of the combination of print and pictures that tell a story.

Another strategy used in the whole language approach is an emphasis on an individualized reading program. The basic concepts of this program are self selection of materials, self-pacing, and flexible subgrouping in the classroom. Self-selection suggests that children show their readiness through the spontaneous selection of materials they want to read. As a result, children are said to be more interested in reading, read more at home, show more interest in improvement, develop more favorable attitudes toward school in general, are more self-motivated, and show greater self-confidence (DeChant, 1993).

Another component of whole language, especially seen in Kindergarten, is a theme-based approach. Integrated thematic units and project approaches provide many opportunities for children to become deeply involved in reading because they are seeking to find questions that concern them, topics that intrigue them, and projects that engage them (Raines, 1995). Teachers can demonstrate reading, writing, research, and thinking processes within the context of the topic that is being studied. For example, a popular theme for many Kindergarten teachers is the teddy bear unit. In this unit, students read literature about bears, do art work, act out plays, participate in counting activities, etc., using bears. Stanek (1993) describes one specific teddy bear unit designed by a Kindergarten teacher in Glendale, California. Every day during her unit, she reads a story about bears from one of the books found in the class library. The Berenstein Bears, Paddington, The Three Bears, and A Pocket for

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Corduroy are all favorites. The children then create and read their own books. They cut out three bear shapes and put stories that they can read into the bears' tummies. Thus, they also make books that tell stories through words and illustrations. Next is the math unit. Children count, add, and subtract using manipulative bears. At the end of the week, they have a teddy bear sleepover. The children come to school in pajamas and bring teddy bears. Then the teacher or students read a bedtime story. This is just one example of how the reading process can be centered around a theme.

Phonics

A whole language curriculum is designed to teach children the fundamentals of reading while making the experience enjoyable. However, while the whole language curriculum is an excellent tool, it must be accompanied by a phonics program in order to be completely successful. For decades, educators have been struggling to provide the best possible reading instruction for elementary age children. The debate usually revolves around whether or not a whole language or phonics approach should be used to teach reading to Kindergarten and first grade students. Research has shown that the integration of a whole language curriculum with a phonics program produces the best results in early readers.

Juel asserts, "The aim of phonics instruction is, of course, to help children understand spelling-sound relationships, i.e., to understand the basis for alphabetic written languages" (Juel, 1994, p. 141). The goal of any phonics program would be to teach children about the letters of the alphabet and the sounds that those letters represent. Ideally, by taking steps to achieve this goal, Kindergarten and first grade students would come away knowing how to decode words based on the sounds of the letters that make up words. The problem with this ideal is that it is very difficult to teach every possible sound that each combination of letters produces. Consequently, it makes better sense for students to be taught the most common letter-sound relationships that exist in the English language. The more realistic goal of a phonics program should be "to teach as few patterns as necessary to: (1) get the idea across that such patterns exist and can be useful in word identification, and (2) to give the child some idea of what these patterns are even though the teacher will of necessity distort them" (Juel, 1994, p. 142). If students are taught phonics using this strategy, their development can be accompanied by a whole language

curriculum in which they are surrounded by print that demonstrates both the rules and the exceptions that they are learning through phonetic instruction.

Although intense exposure to literature and print will help children to understand language, "using literature alone to develop spelling-sound knowledge is exceedingly difficult" (Juel, 1994, p. 149). Phonetic instruction helps children understand the rules that govern the print to which they are exposed. Yopp states, "Phonemic awareness should be developed as part of the larger literacy program for many children" (Yopp, 1995, p. 26). Due to the recent discovery that whole language and phonics programs can coexist, many school systems are changing their existing early reading programs to incorporate both approaches.

Teachers are now faced with the dilemma of deciding what kind of phonics programs would be most effective and to what extent should the phonics strand of the instruction be emphasized. Further, what steps can teachers take to integrate phonics instruction with the whole language philosophy? Shefelbine summarizes this argument by saying, "Although there is agreement on the general knowledge of phonics, there still exist substantially different views on what content needs to be taught, when, in what manner, and for what purposes" (Shefelbine, 1995, p. 8). The approach used to teach phonics varies among teachers, but many hold similar views based on research that describes the best ways to instill phonemic awareness in emerging readers.

Shefelbine (1995) argues that there are several necessary components of any phonics program. He asserts that the best way to teach phonics within a whole language curriculum is by adhering to this general rule: "[Phonics] should not overshadow an abundance of engaging experiences with reading and listening to books, and writing for a variety of purposes" (Shefelbine, 1995,

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p. 9). According to this statement, phonics should not be the primary focus of reading instruction, but it should be an integral part of the early reading experience. Based on the research of Bradley and Bryant, Shefelbine (1983) also concludes that "using letters to represent sounds improved the effectiveness of phonemic awareness training" (p. 9). Therefore, all phonics programs should be designed to teach phoneme sounds as well as the letters that correspond to those sounds. Shefelbine also states that "A reasonable approach to teaching [phonics] skills in the content is to begin with skills in the context of a story" (Shefelbine, 1995, p. 10). Using this suggestion, teachers can begin teaching phonics skills within the context of a story, which would combine the phonics and the contextual approaches to teaching reading.

Carbo (1996), provides specific recommendations on how to effectively teach phonics in a whole language curriculum. Carbo says that phonics programs should be balanced by focusing on literature and fun. Teachers must "guard against boredom, a common side effect of phonics" (p. 37). In order for teachers to follow Carbo's suggestions, they must seek phonics programs in which students are not bombarded by drill and practice activities. Instead, children can learn phonics using teaching methods that appeal to different kinds of learners. If students are introduced to phonics using visual, auditory, and tactile methods, every student will benefit from the instruction.

Griffith and Olson (1992) write about the best way to develop a child's phonemic awareness. These educators assert that teachers can help children develop phonemic awareness if they do the following: "They can expose them to literature that plays with the sounds in language, they can provide extensive writing experiences, and they can provide explicit instruction in sound segmentation and in representing the sounds heard in words" (p. 517). By

connecting phonemic sounds to letters, students progress as readers and writers.

Thomas Gunning (1988) breaks down the specific components of a successful phonics program. He identifies the five aspects of teaching beginning phonics that should not be excluded from any phonics program. These are "Auditory Discrimination, Auditory Perception, Linking Letter and Sound, Practice, and Application" (p. 20). According to Gunning, any approach used to teach phonics and/or phonemic awareness should include these components.

Phonics programs need to emphasize a hands-on approach to teaching letters and sounds in order to ensure a complete understanding of letter-sound relationships for all students. Brown and Carey (1995) provide teachers with activities for a whole language plus a phonics approach to reading. They assert that their hands-on activities "bridge the gap between whole language and more traditional phonetic approaches by providing young children with 'real' reading experiences as they master the letters and sounds of the alphabet" (p. v). By using hands-on activities, teachers can provide students with auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic experiences regarding letters and sounds. By experiencing letter-sound relationships, students will obtain a better understanding of how letters and sounds make up words. Consequently, they will become better readers and writers.

While it is generally agreed upon that neither phonics nor whole language approaches to reading are mutually exclusive, the emphasis given to each strand of instruction is still subject to debate. The educational researchers and authors who have written on this subject tend to favor a whole language emphasis with the integration of a phonetic component. The phonics aspect of the curriculum should focus on teaching all children letter-sound relationships

using many different teaching approaches to accommodate for the different learning styles of the students. By teaching phonics in the context of stories, teachers can guard against boredom which has resulted from phonetic instruction in the past (Carbo, 1996, p. 37). Incorporating a hands-on, multifaceted phonics program into a whole language curriculum will produce students who have both the ability and the desire to read and write.

History Of Super Sounds

The Super Sounds program was designed in 1976 by Jan Hughes. During this time, Hughes was a speech-language pathologist in the Charlottesville City Public School System. The program was devised as a result of concerns regarding student articulation and pronunciation. This was especially evident on the elementary school level. To address the issue, Hughes created a sound-symbol program which would "foster the development of communication skills" (Sams & Young, 1976, p. 2). It was to be implemented in the Kindergarten classrooms. The program was originally entitled the "Super Sound Speech Improvement Program." At that time, its primary purpose was to enhance speech formation.

The original Super Sound Speech Improvement Program consisted of twenty-two stories. The stories represented five short vowel sounds and nineteen consonant sounds. The sounds were addressed individually, with the exception of *K*. The *K* sound was taught using the letters *K* and *C* simultaneously, using the characters Carl and Katy Crow. The program introduced each sound with an accompanying character and story. Each sound was also represented by a hand signal. The hand signal was used throughout the story to highlight words having that particular key sound.

Speech-language pathologists could be found in Kindergarten classrooms on a weekly basis. Their presentations normally lasted 20-30 minutes. The speech-language pathologists and classroom teachers would decide on a suitable time, as the presentation required whole group instruction.

The speech pathologists were responsible for reading the story and directing the hand signal that was associated with each sound. They also illustrated the story on chart paper as it was being read. Focus was placed on each sound to ensure proper formation, production and auditory discrimination. Speech-language pathologists used whole group instruction with this sound program to identify children exhibiting specific speech production problems and to evaluate the extent of these problems. It was also used to decide what, if any, individual speech therapy should be administered. For those students not displaying any apparent auditory discrimination problems, it would still serve as a speech improvement program. Speech-language pathologists would discuss identified problems with the Kindergarten teacher and offer strategies on how to address them. They would also make the first grade teachers aware of students who had difficulty in learning sounds in the Kindergarten program the year before.

During the original implementation of the program, the classroom teachers played a very minor role. The speech-language pathologists would come into the classroom to teach once a week. The classroom teachers were asked to remain in the classroom during each presentation to help discipline children when necessary. The classroom teachers were also asked to reinforce sounds through follow-up activities, all of which were provided by the speech-language pathologists. They were also responsible for displaying the character pictures around the room. Teachers were also encouraged to provide the

speech-language pathologists with feedback concerning individual progress or problems.

In essence, the Super Sound Speech Improvement Program was administered by speech-language pathologists and supported by classroom teachers. It was both understood and accepted that the classroom teacher would observe as the speech-language pathologist introduced sounds. Jan Hughes, with the input of several other speech-language pathologists in the area, was responsible for creating this Super Sound Speech Improvement Program. A list of the Super Sounds characters in order of presentation is as follows:

Super Sounds Characters

1. SAMMY SNAKE
2. RED ROOSTER
3. MARY MOUSE
4. POPCORN PETE
5. AGGIE APPLE
6. FREDDIE FOX
7. BAD BOY
8. TIM TICK TOCK
9. CARL AND KATY CROW
10. ITCHY INDIAN
11. HAPPY HARRY
12. NEW NELLY
13. DOUGHNUT DAN
14. GURGLE THE FROG
15. OTTO OPPOSITE
16. WINDY WIND
17. LITTLE LEO LION
18. VICTOR VAMPIRE
19. YELLOW YO-YO
20. UNCLE BUNNY
21. JUMPING JACK
22. CHUBBY CHIPMUNK
23. SHORT SHARON
24. THIRSTY THING
25. EDDIE SPAGHETTI
26. APRIL APE
27. FIVE WHITE MICE
28. EASTER EAGLE
29. OLD OAK TREE
30. ZIPPY ZOOKEEPER

Current Implementation

Although Super Sounds began as a program for sound articulation, it is used today as a phonics component to a developmental whole language curriculum. Teachers integrate content areas and expose students to the letter-sound relationship using many hands-on techniques. Because students experience the letters using kinesthetic, visual, auditory, and tactile means, they obtain a better understanding of the letters and their role in language. Using the Super Sounds program, students not only learn beginning reading strategies based on letter and sound correspondence, they also begin writing the letters. Through the initial Super Sounds whole group instruction and the activities that follow, students are exposed to the letter-sound relationship and are taught to recognize it in words.

The Super Sounds program has undergone tremendous change since its introduction in the 1970s. Kindergarten classes today follow a similar routine when teaching students the letters and sounds in the alphabet. Each week, teachers introduce their students to a new letter-sound relationship. If a classroom is shared by two teachers, the classes usually combine for the Super Sounds lesson. Consequently, both teachers are able to participate in the instruction of the letter-sound. The Super Sounds program is composed of a laminated picture of the character drawn for each letter-sound and a story about that character involving many words that begin with the letter-sound being discussed. One teacher chooses to read the story. On a large drawing pad, the other teacher draws pictures of the words in the story that begin with the letter-

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sound being taught. Some teachers who do not feel confident in their artistic ability choose to use a flannel board to represent the words in the story. The teacher who is drawing the pictures draws them from left to right to imitate words and sentence structure. By seeing the teacher draw left to right, kids become aware that reading occurs from left to right, and they emulate that when writing.

After the story is completed, one of the teachers asks the students to recall what word each of the drawings represents. Kids raise their hands and identify the words from the story that they remember, and the teacher who drew the pictures labels them accordingly. This activity helps the students equate the sound with the letter and with words. For example, if the picture being labeled is Red Rooster, the teacher would emphasize the connection between the letter *R* and the sound that it makes. By placing emphasis on the *R* sound in the words, students learn to associate the sound with the letter in other words. After all of the pictures have been labeled, the teacher asks if there are any kids in the class whose names begin with the letter-sound being studied. Since the first thing most kids learn to read is their name, drawing a parallel between the letter-sound of the week and the initial letter-sound in their names is an effective technique for helping children to recognize other words that begin with the same letter or sound.

Once the introduction to the letter-sound has been completed, the students return to their own classrooms. Many follow-up activities accompany the initial letter-sound instruction in order to strengthen the connection

between the letter and the sound for the children. The activity that directly follows the whole group Super Sounds instruction involves sound books. Each child acquires a sound book in the first week of school that always accompanies the Super Sounds instruction. In their small groups, students open their sound books to the page with the letter of the week. Both the capital and lower case letters have been written in the book according to the order in which they have been studied. On this page, the students are instructed to draw pictures of things that begin with the letter-sound of the week. Although they are allowed to draw pictures that were featured in the stories, they are encouraged to come up with new words that begin with the same initial letter or sound. In the beginning of the year, teachers often help students to label their pictures in order to acquaint them with print. After several weeks, students are encouraged to label their own pictures in the sound book using invented spelling or with spelling help from the teacher. The teacher usually goes through the sound books and spells words correctly that have been previously misspelled to ensure that kids are being exposed to the correct spelling. However, students are never punished for invented spelling. This aspect of the Super Sounds program is individualized to accommodate for the different ability levels within a classroom. All students are able to progress at their own developmental level using this method of instruction.

Another follow-up activity that teachers use involves writing the letter of the week using various substances. Constructing the letter using clay or shaving cream helps the children concentrate on how the letter is formed.

Directly following this activity, students are given the chance to practice writing the letter in both upper and lower case. Special cooking activities featuring foods beginning with the letter-sound being taught also familiarize students with the letter and sound. Also, they are learning to associate the letter with words and objects. For example, the week that the short *A* sound is taught, students participate in a number of interesting activities. The Super Sounds character that is associated with *A* is Aggie Apple; therefore, the teachers integrate *A* and apple into many content areas. Consequently, the students get to take a field trip to Carter's Mountain to pick apples. They do various graphing activities with different colored apples which corresponds to the Kindergarten math curriculum, and they make apple sauce. The students also sing songs that feature short *A* sounds and/or apples, and they read a poem with words that begin with *A* and focus on the short *A* sound. These activities accompany the sound books and the writing practice that they get each week.

Some teachers choose to use an activity called sound pockets which helps students discriminate between sounds and letters. For example, *S*, *R*, *M*, and *P* are taught in the first four weeks of the program. Each letter-sound gets its own pocket which contains items that have the initial letter-sound being studied. The *S* pocket may contain, scissors, soap, string, or socks. The teacher will give each child an object, and the child will place the object in the correct pocket based on the initial letter-sound. This allows students to discriminate between the four sounds and to associate the letter-sound with an object.

Teachers are given the freedom to design any activities that they feel will help the students learn to read, write, and articulate sounds. With this flexibility, teachers can continue to develop and use instructional lessons that will help students associate letters and sounds with words and language.

Super Sounds and the Curriculum

The Super Sounds program satisfies many of the objectives outlined in the Kindergarten language arts curriculum. According to the curriculum guidelines, Kindergarten students in the Early Emergent Stage of the reading process should become familiar with the following concepts in order to move into the Late Emergent Stage; Listening to stories, understanding directionality of print (left to right, top to bottom), becoming aware of the function of print, and tracking of words. The Super Sounds program is composed of stories about each of the letters of the alphabet; therefore, each week students listen for the words that begin with the sound being learned. As the teacher draws pictures of the key words in the stories, the students learn through observation that the teacher draws from left to right and top to bottom. Consequently, the students learn that the directionality of print follows the same pattern. With the input of the students, the teacher labels the pictures that have been drawn. Students become aware that the function of print is to communicate the ideas expressed in the story. After all of the pictures in the story are labeled, teachers point to the individual words in an effort to track the print. By doing this, students get a better sense of the directionality of print as well as the concept of word.

The sound book activity that follows the whole group instruction of Super Sounds helps students with the writing objectives mentioned in the Kindergarten curriculum. In the Preliterate Stage, Kindergarten students are expected to be able to explain drawings and scribbles, label objects, and manipulate writing tools. The sound books are designed to allow students to

practice these important skills. As students draw pictures of words that begin with the letter-sound being studied that week, teachers ask students to explain what they drew. Depending on the developmental level of the students, they label their own drawings in the sound books. This activity gives students the opportunity to manipulate writing tools such as pencils or crayons in order to explain and label their drawings. As a result, the Super Sounds program meets the Kindergarten writing curriculum standards.

The Kindergarten curriculum clearly establishes several phonics goals and guidelines as well. In Kindergarten, students will learn to recognize and write the letters of the alphabet and match some beginning consonant sounds with letters. Not only does the Super Sounds program address these goals, it surpasses them by adding the vowel sounds and several digraphs. Throughout the week, students are exposed to many different activities featuring the letter-sound that is being studied. Students are given many opportunities to recognize and write the letter. The story that is read when the letter/sound is introduced and the sound book activity that follows are intended to teach the students to associate a particular letter with a certain sound as well as the different sounds that some letters make.

The Super Sounds program adheres to the language arts curriculum for Kindergarten students in order to ensure that the students are developing to their full potential. In many cases, the program challenges the students to excel by including aspects of the first grade curriculum like vowels and digraphs. As

a result, the Super Sounds program surpasses other phonemic awareness programs that concentrate solely on the Kindergarten curriculum.

Assessment Tools

In our evaluation of the Super Sounds program, we focused on two important aspects in the development of the emergent reader: Letter-sound recognition and initial letter recognition. We tested forty-one students from two Kindergarten classes at Hollymead Elementary School over the course of two weeks. Students were pulled from the classroom and tested on an individual basis. The library provided each student with a quiet atmosphere with little or no distractions. The assessment tools were intended to ascertain student comprehension of letters and their accompanying sounds.

The first assessment involved the students' ability to identify the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they produce. Each letter of the alphabet was written in both upper and lower case print on an index card. Each student was shown a card in random sequence in order to alleviate the tendency to follow the pattern of the alphabet. The directions were clearly explained in the following manner: "Mrs. Layman and Miss O'Neal are doing a project for our school, and we need your help. Would you like to help us? Okay, thank you. When we show you a card with a letter written on it, you can tell us the name of the letter and the sound that letter makes. If you don't know one, it is okay. Just let us know if you want to go on to the next letter." As each card was shown, the response of the students were recorded on a chart. The chart listed the letters of the alphabet, each student's name, and two columns labeled "letter" and "sound." A check was given for each correct response. If students could not identify a letter or a sound, a question mark was placed in the

appropriate column. If they were incorrect in their response, we noted the letter or sound that they gave. We placed an asterisk beside the corresponding check if they associated the letter or sound with the Super Sounds character. For example, child D said, "Ooh! That's Freddie Fox Ffff." The correct responses were tallied, and the results were depicted in a bar graph (see Appendices A1 and A2).

The second assessment targeted initial letter recognition. We devised a list of words featuring letters and sounds of the alphabet. We also added three digraphs that are studied in the Super Sounds program. For a list of the words used, please refer to Appendices B1 and B2. A chart was also used in this assessment to record student responses. The chart contained a list of the words and a list of the students' names. In the directions, we stated, "We are going to say a word, and we want you to listen very carefully to the first sound that you hear. Then, we would like for you to tell us the first letter of the word. If you don't know, it 's okay to move on to the next word." After the directions were given, the first word was read. The order of the words was varied to minimize the reliance on the pattern of the alphabet. If students responded with the correct letter, a check was placed in the box. If the response was incorrect, the actual letter that they said was placed in the box. A question mark was recorded if students could not provide an answer. Once again, we used an asterisk to signify an association between the letter and the Super Sounds character. The checks were compiled and the results can be found in a horizontal bar graph (see Appendices B1 and B2).

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Analysis of Results

After the data from the two assessments were compiled, we concluded that the Super Sounds program is an effective phonemic awareness tool when used in a whole language curriculum. The students demonstrated knowledge of letter-sound recognition and initial letter recognition. The graphs depict the actual number, out of forty-one students, who gave the correct response. We were extremely pleased with the results of the data and the number of students who referred to Super Sounds.

Our analysis begins with a discussion of the letter-sound recognition assessment. Letter recognition was introduced first. The Kindergartners performed very well on this aspect of the assessment. The number of students identifying all of the letters of the alphabet correctly was thirty-eight out of forty-one. Every student correctly identified the letters *A, B, O,* and *S.* Forty students knew the letters *I, K,* and *L.* Thirty-nine students recognized the letters *D, F, M, N, P,* and *R.* The letter causing the most difficulty for students was *Q*; however, thirty-two out of forty-one students were able to name the letter. Because our teaching associateships began on the first day of school, we had firsthand knowledge of the students' initial performance on letter recognition tasks. Consequently, we were able to tell that all of the students showed tremendous improvement on letter recognition from the beginning of the school year.

The sound recognition aspect of the assessment was a little bit more difficult to test because students had no previous experience associating letters

with sounds. However, there were several sounds that had a perfect correlation between the letter and the sound. Those letters were *J* and *K*. There were also many other letters and sounds that students were able to associate. *B, C, D, G, P, R, S, T, V,* and *Z* were among the letters and sounds having a high correlation. The sounds that were least recognized were those associated with vowels, with the exception of *A* because it is the highest frequency vowel. The Super Sounds program accounts for the difficulty that children have in identifying vowel sounds by introducing long vowels at the end of the program. The letters *Q* and *X* are also challenging for students because of the rarity of their usage in the English Language.

The letter-sound relationships causing the most problems for students are those where different sounds are associated with a single letter. For example, *X* does not have a distinctive sound; therefore, it can have the sound that is usually associated with *S* or *Z*. In fact, there is no Super Sounds character or story to introduce *X*, which accounts for the small number of students who were able to identify a sound for that letter. Since vowels are an integral part of the first grade curriculum, these students actually are performing on or above grade level. The Super Sounds program addresses these problematic letters and sounds so that Kindergartners will have some exposure to them prior to entering first grade. It is safe to assume that Super Sounds has a strong impact on students' ability to correlate a letter with the sound that it makes because many of the students referred to the Super Sounds character when identifying either the letter or the sound. Consequently, the

Super Sounds characters provide an easy retrieval system for specific sounds that letters make.

The second assessment dealt with initial letter recognition from a list of words that was read to each student. If the students identified the correct letter at the beginning of each word, they received a checkmark in the appropriate box. The checks were tabulated and depicted in graph form (see Appendices B1 & B2). However, students were given credit for correctly identifying the initial phoneme. For example, the word *car* appeared on our list. Twenty- six students responded with the letter *C*. Ten students of the remaining fifteen answered with the letter *K*. Since the word *car* emphasizes the hard *C* sound, students conveyed phonemic awareness skills by linking the hard *C* and the *K* sound. Students also connect these two sounds as a result of the Super Sounds program. The program introduces the hard *C* sound and the *K* sound simultaneously using the characters Carl & Katy Crow. This allows students to realize that the same sound can be made by two different letters.

Students who did not mention the correct initial letter but were able to recognize the dominant initial phoneme were acknowledged in our data. For example, of the twenty-four students who did not answer *E* for *elephant,* fifteen said *L*. The students answering *L* were correct in identifying the dominant sound in the beginning of the word. The seventeen students who responded correctly either understood the concept of the silent *E* or previously obtained the information from print. The word *xylophone* is another example. Seven students were able to correctly respond with the letter *X*, while twenty-nine

students answered Z. Again, the students are recognizing initial sounds and correlating the sound with the letter. Students have had very little exposure to the letter and sound of *X*. Super Sounds does not address the letter *X*, but it does teach *Z*. Therefore, students are more likely to connect the sound that *X* makes with *Z*.

Although all of the students did not correctly identify the initial letter in the words that began with a vowel, most of the students were aware that a vowel did belong there. In the word *igloo*, fifteen students named *I* as the initial letter. Eighteen students, on the other hand, said that *E* was the first letter of the word *igloo*. Out of all of the students that we assessed, only four did not respond with a vowel. This trend was also seen in other words beginning with a vowel. Students are demonstrating an understanding of the placement of vowels, although they have not quite perfected the usage of vowels. Students performed extremely well on the words that began with a long vowel sound. Those that did not state the correct vowel still responded with a vowel. The Super Sounds program prepares Kindergarten students for the first grade by making them aware of both the long and short vowel sounds. Most all of the students, through the use of the Super Sounds program, have a general understanding of the presence of vowels in words.

Many of the words did not pose a problem for the majority of the students. The words that began with the following sounds were correctly answered by thirty-four or more of the forty-one students: *B, D, F, K, L, P, R, S, T, V,* Z, long *A,* and long *E* (See Appendices B1and B2). The words causing the

most difficulty for students were either vowels, low frequency letters like *X* and *Q*, or those that have not been addressed by the Super Sounds program yet. Students have not yet been taught the digraph sounds, *Ch*, *Sh*, or *Th*, which is reflected by the small number of correct responses to the initial letters in the words beginning with digraphs. We are certain that after students have been exposed to digraphs through the Super Sounds program, there will be a significant increase in the number of correct responses. The Super Sounds program intentionally places the digraphs at the end of the school year to account for the students' developmental level.

Conclusion

As a result of the research conducted on the Super Sounds program, we are convinced that it is an effective phonics tool in a whole language curriculum. Based on our literature review, we have concluded that a whole language curriculum should have a phonics component. The Kindergarten teachers currently implementing the program as well as the speech-language pathologist who helped develop it agree that Super Sounds is an excellent introduction to the reading process. Our assessments have shown that the Super Sounds program has made a tremendous impact on students' letter-sound recognition and their initial letter recognition skills.

Students are clearly connecting letters and sounds with Super Sounds characters and stories. Throughout the assessments, students recalled Super Sounds characters when identifying a letter or a sound. Also, many students who knew only the letter, relied on the Super Sounds characters to determine the sound that accompanies the letter. This was especially evident in lower-achieving students who are just now grasping the letters and sounds. The Super Sounds program caters to individual learning styles of students by utilizing visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile activities. When integrated into a whole language curriculum, the Super Sounds program is extremely successful in developing phonemic awareness and beginning reading skills.

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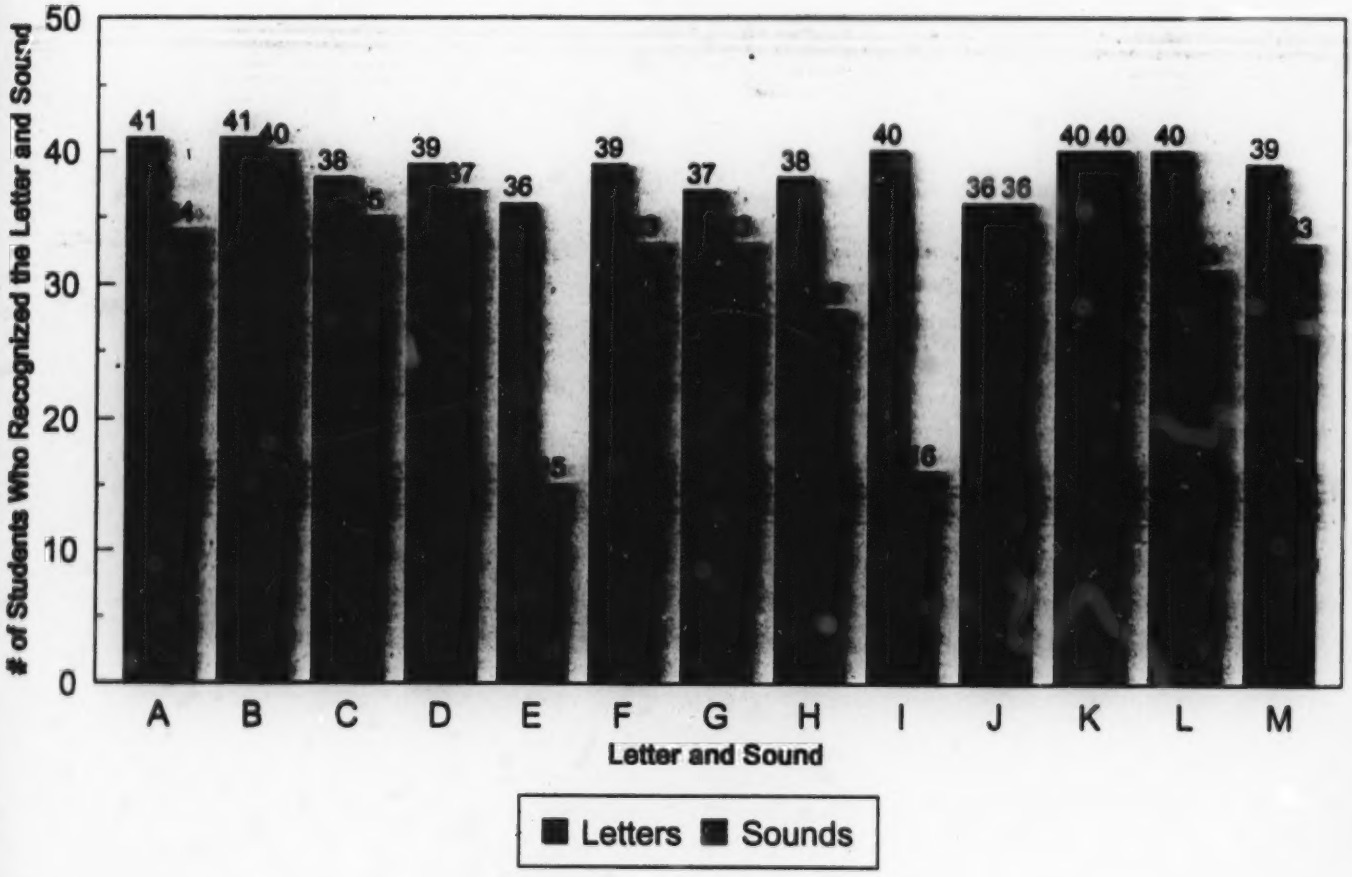
Letter-Sound Recognition



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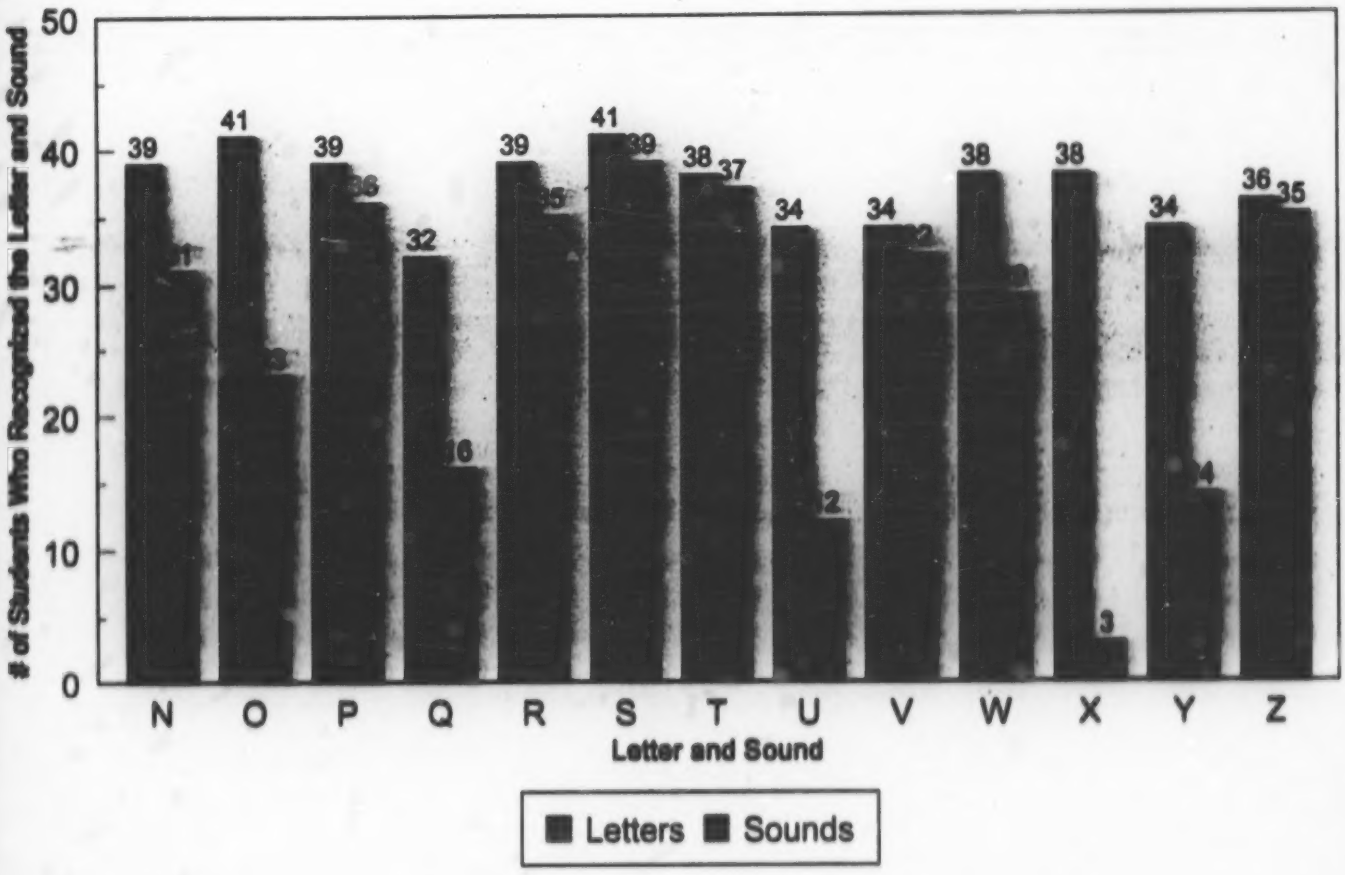
Letter-Sound Recognition



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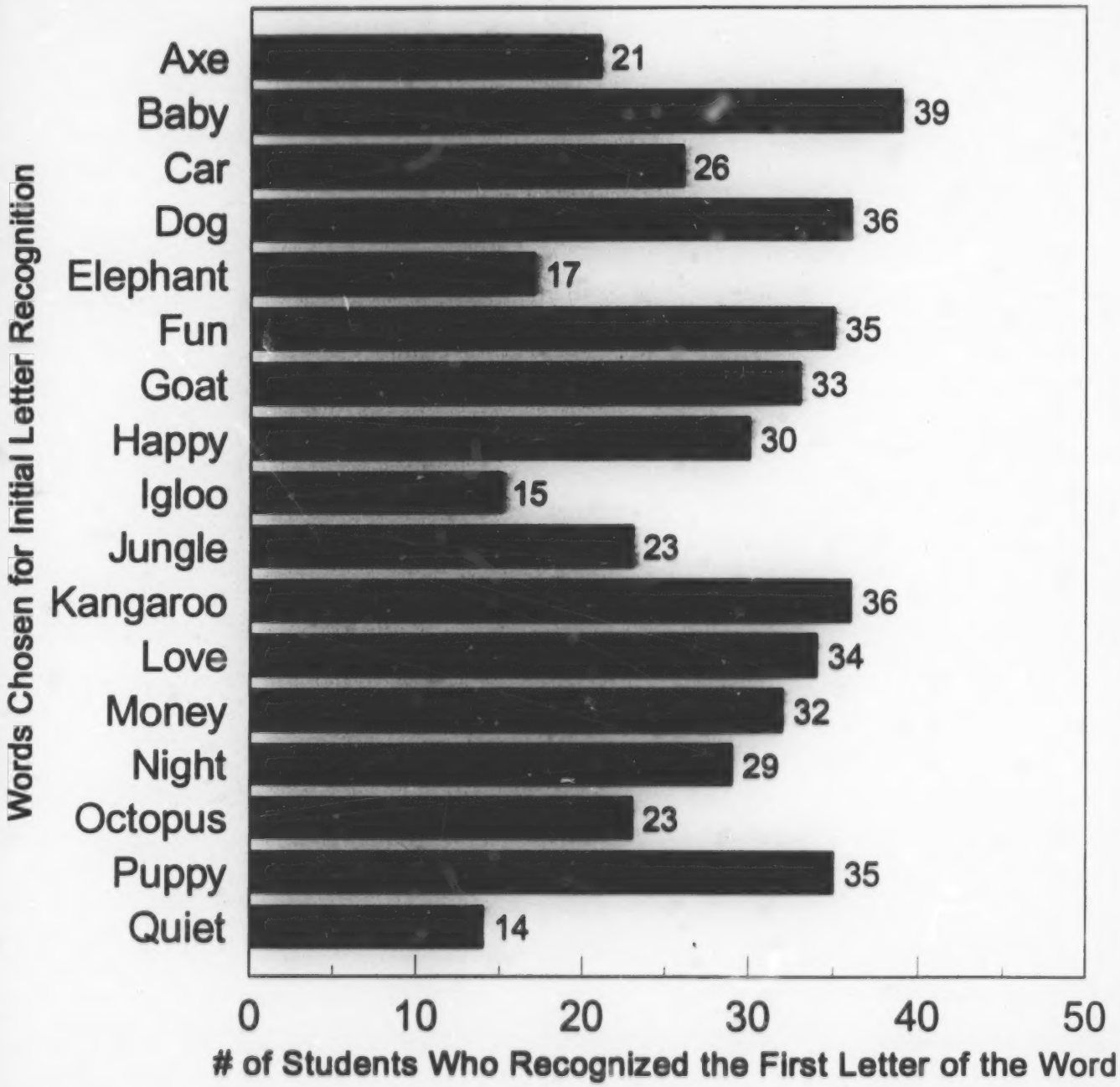

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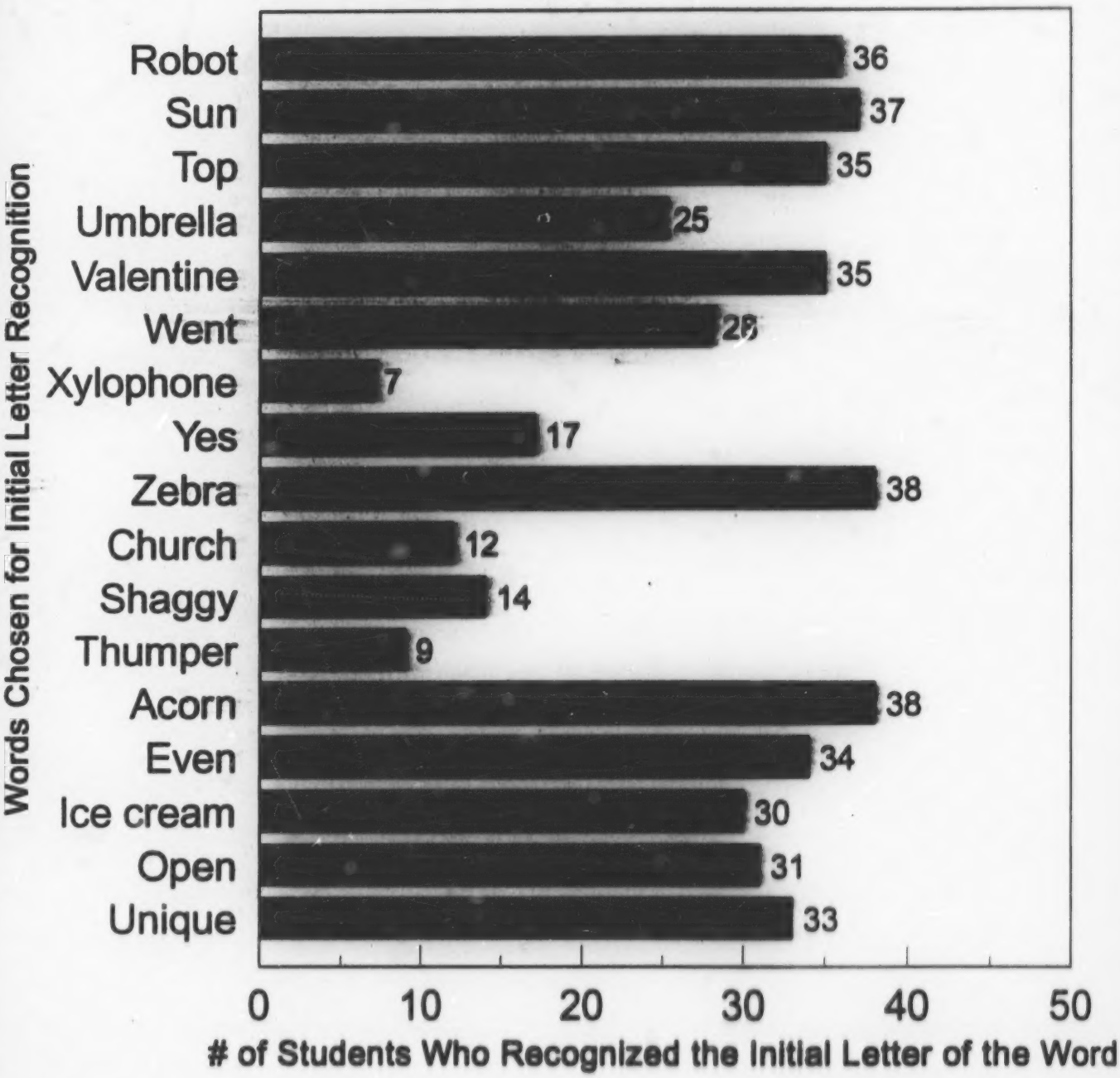

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Informal Telephone Interview

Ms. Paula White
Murray Elementary School
February 19, 1996

Narrative of her experiences teaching Super Sounds in the past

I taught Kindergarten at Brownsville Elementary School. Kendall Young and I implemented the Super Sounds program until five years ago when we both moved to Murray Elementary School. Kendall Young was one of the creators of the Super Sounds programs in the Late 1970s. The Super Sounds program uses stories, drawings, and activities in order to familiarize students with letters and their sounds. Currently, I use another program called a vowel circle that is aimed at K-1 classrooms. It is a lot like the Super Sounds program in the way that it deals with letters and sounds. I really like the Super Sounds program, but it doesn't address a lot of the needs of first grade students beyond the interaction with vowels.

When I first started using Super Sounds at Brownsville, the lesson took place once a week and there were stories, pictures, and hand motions for each sound. All week the class would participate in activities with the sound they were studying that particular week. I actually do activities that combine sounds that the kids learn in Super Sounds. I prefer a thematic approach to studying letters and sounds because it fits in with the events that are taking place outside the realm of phonics instruction. For example, I started with *S, R, M, P, and A*. The units that my class studied at the time often featured things that shared these letters. If we were doing a unit on community helpers, I would emphasize that each word in Rescue Squad begins with a Super Sound that we have just studied.

Super Sounds can work very well if it is integrated into the curriculum and the units that are being studied concurrently. If the speech pathologist and the teacher work together to ensure that the fundamentals of the program are being achieved, then the program is a great success.

Interview

Ms. Gail Mckay
Hollymead Elementary School
February 28, 1996

1. **How long have you been teaching?**

"Twenty-two years."

2. **How long have you taught Kindergarten?**

"Twenty years. I taught first grade for the first two years."

3. **In your classroom, how does the reading process begin?**

"I like to begin the reading process by teaching phonics using the Super Sounds program. By learning to understand letter/sound relationships, students are better prepared to start reading the print that is available in the classroom."

4. **How were you first introduced to the Super Sounds program?**

"The speech clinician used to come into the classroom once a week and teach kids Super Sounds. There was very little follow up to what the speech clinician taught. The Super Sounds program was initially used for articulation, so many teachers did not do any activities with the sounds to accompany the program."

5. **Have there been any changes since then?**

"Now teachers address both the letter and the sound. Originally the program dealt specifically with the sound that the letter makes. Now, I teach both the sounds and the letters. Kids can learn to pronounce, write, and read the letters. It helps them learn to decode words as they become readers."

6. **How many years have you been teaching Super Sounds?**

"Seventeen years. Before that the speech clinician was in charge of it. However, once the speech clinician stopped using the Super Sounds program, teachers adopted it for instruction and expanded it beyond its original purpose. Teachers loved the program because it is a great way to provide phonemic awareness in children without boring them with phonics drills."

7. **How do you teach it?**

"Ms. Dixon and I combine our classes. One of us reads the story while the other places pictures on a flannel board. It addresses both visual and auditory aspects of learning. Following the initial reading of the story, Ms. Dixon and I do a lot of follow up activities with the kids. The activities help the kids experience the letters and sounds by seeing, hearing, and touching them."

8. **Have you ever used any other form of phonetic instruction in place of Super Sounds?**

"No!"

9. **How do you approach the different sounds that letters can make?**

"We talk about their similarity. A lot of times we will do a picture sort that involves words that begin with C or K, and that helps kids to see the difference. We generally don't correct kids for spelling words with the wrong initial consonant if the sound is the same. Often, we will write the correct spelling underneath theirs. We always try to explain that letters are tricky, and they sometimes try to fool you."

10. **How do you incorporate vowels?**

"The Super Sounds program addresses the different sounds that vowels make at the end of the program. It helps to bridge the gap between Kindergarten and first grade. Through constant interaction with literature, kids become aware of vowels throughout the year although they receive no formal instruction until the end."

11. **How does Super Sounds help children in the reading process?**

"They have the opportunity to interact with the letter/sounds in many ways. They hear, see, and feel the sounds through various activities. They can link letters by knowing the different sounds that letters can make. Super Sounds really helps kids learn how to decode words."

12. **Why do you choose to teach this method as opposed to another?**

"I see that it works! It has everything that it needs to make it fit into the Whole Language curriculum. It also accounts for different learning styles and developmental levels. The stories are entertaining and fun. The kids really get into them, and they learn to like reading even while studying phonics."

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Interview

Mrs. Linda Jernigan
Hollymead Elementary School
February 26, 1996

1. **How long have you been teaching?**

   "Sixteen years"

2. **How long have you taught Kindergarten?**

   "I have only taught Kindergarten. (16 years)"

3. **In your classroom, how does the reading process begin?**

"It begins on day one. The children are surrounded by print, such as books, signs, and students' names. I constantly change the literature in the room so that the kids always have something new to read. The books are usually related to the unit that we are currently studying. At the beginning of the year, I always make a book of the students' names, and they usually learn to read that first. Upon their arrival in Kindergarten, they hear stories and make books. Each day the children are encouraged to look at books around the room as well. Within the first two or three weeks of school, we begin the Super Sounds program to help with phonemic awareness and to establish a routine. Shortly after these activities are underway, the students make Word Banks. We also have a writing workshop that helps kids learn to write at the same time that they are learning to read."

4. **How were you first introduced to the Super Sounds Program?**

"When I was a teaching associate at the University of Virginia in 1979, I did my student teaching at Rose Hill Elementary School. At the time, it was an Albemarle County School. I observed a speech pathologist come into the Kindergarten classroom in which I was teaching and read the Super Sounds stories to the class. In the late 70s, Super Sounds was an articulation mechanism employed in Albemarle County Schools. After the speech pathologist would tell the story and draw the pictures for the kids, it was the teacher's job to perform follow up activities for the rest of the week. These activities were multisensory, and involved a lot of art with the letters and sounds. It was a lot less academic at that time than it is now."

5. **Have there been any changes since then?**

"Yes! First of all, the classroom teacher teaches it now. It is also much more academic than it used to be. Instead of being implemented purely for articulation purposes, it is also a means of teaching handwriting. On the day that a new sound/letter is introduced, a handout is given to each student for

homework. This worksheet provides a chance to categorize pictures according to initial and ending consonant sounds, and it gives the kids an opportunity to practice writing the letter. There are also many follow up activities that expose the children to the letter using different means. The Super Sounds program has evolved to accommodate the changing Kindergarten curriculum."

6. **How many years have you been teaching Super Sounds?**

"Nine years and during my student teaching placement. My first job was at Buckingham County Schools, and they did not use the Super Sounds program. I taught there for two years, and I used the basal readers that they advocated. However, I became frustrated at how little the children actually liked to read, so I made up stories for the letters. Basically, I invented a program modeled after Super Sounds. Of course, I did it wrong, because I did not teach the letters in the correct order, but at least the kids seemed to be enjoying literature more and performing better with the letter stories."

7. **How do you teach it?**

"On Tuesdays, Mrs. Pfaltz and I combine our two classes. She draws the pictures that accompany the story that I read. After the story, we ask the kids to raise their hands and recall what each of the pictures represents in the story. As the kids provide names for the pictures that Mrs. Pfaltz has drawn, she labels them on the paper. Then, the kids have a chance to provide new words that begin with the same sound. All of the kids who have a name that begins with the letter of the week are asked to stand up. After the circle activites are finished, the students go back to their respective classrooms, and we spend the rest of the week doing different activites with the letter/sound. The activities in which the kids participate are designed to increase letter/sound recognition, handwriting, labeling, sorting, and fine motor skills. All of these are aspects of the Kindergarten curriculum. For example, for the letter S we may cook soup, write the letter S in clay, draw and label S pictures in the sound books, and many other similar activities. Starting with the first Super Sounds instruction, kids are encouraged to write and begin labeling their drawings."

8. **Have you ever used any other form of phonetic instruction in place of Super Sounds?**

"During the six years that I didn't use Super Sounds, I invented stories for the letters by modeling the Super Sounds program. Like I said before, the kids did not enjoy reading and writing as much when all they were exposed to is the basal readers. I wish I would have copied the program from my student teaching placement, then I could have used the program at Buckingham to help those kids to learn to read and write better."

9. **How do you approach the different sounds that letters can make?**

"Well, we do C and K on the same day. We explain the inconsistencies. For example, we say that "C can sometimes sound like K," and we show them words that apply. We teach the "hard G" sound like in goat. Although we try to help kids recognize when C sounds like K or when G sounds like J, we always explain that they should do their best and they will learn even more about those letters that make different sounds in first grade."

10. **How do you incorporate vowels?**

"In January, I do a unit on Dr. Seuss. Since we are addressing word families, it is often easy to incorporate vowel instruction at this time. Also, at the end of the year, the Super Sounds program has stories for the vowel sounds. Once again, they will be doing more with vowels in first grade."

11. **How does Super Sounds help children in the reading process?**

"It teaches them to decode. The students really enjoy the stories that accompany Super Sounds. They learn about letters and sounds while having fun. I also like the way that students can work according to their own level using this program. The sound books are an excellent example. Some kids are labeling their own pictures by October, while others are only able to write the letter that we are studying. Each child can progress at his/her own speed. I also like the way that handwriting is an aspect of the Super Sounds program. This helps kids to learn to write at the same time that they are learning to read."

12. **Why do you choose to teach this method as opposed to another?**

"Phonics is an important strand of teaching kids to read. It is a mistake to omit phonics from a Whole Language curriculum, just as it is also a mistake to teach purely phonics. The Super Sounds program really strengthens kids' desire to read and write. It is a tool that effectively combines phonics and whole language instruction. It helps kids that have different learning styles as well. Regardless of whether or not a child is an auditory or visual learner, he/she can learn using the Super Sounds program. I also really like the way that children are allowed to progress at their own level. Most of all, the reason I keep using Super Sounds is, simply, it works."

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Interview

Ms. Susie Dixon
Hollymead Elementary School
February 28, 1996

1. **How long have you been teaching?**

"Twelve years."

2. **How long have you been teaching Kindergarten?**

"Eleven years"

3. **In your classroom, how does the reading process begin?**

"From the first day, I spend a lot of time reading to the students. I expose them to short stories, poems, and other forms of literature and print. We examine letters and sounds using the Super Sounds program. With Super Sounds they learn to read and write beginning and ending sounds as well. Concurrently, we learn about the concept of word by tracking text. We do several word recogition exercises such as word banks. All of these aspects of reading and writing are taking place at the same time, and they are all integrated together."

4. **How were you first introduced to the Super Sounds Program?**

"I was substituting fifteen years ago, and the speech teacher would come and pull small groups of kids out of the classroom to teach them Super Sounds. The kids would come back with the letter that they were studying written on their hands. The teacher would follow up with letter/sound activities."

5. **Have there been any changes since then?**

"Yes, definitely. Now, each teacher does his/her own thing. You can adapt the program to your own teaching style which makes it effective for any kind of teacher. While Sue Pfaltz and Linda Jernigan draw their pictures. Gail Mckay and I use a flannel board to demonstrate the story. All week long we do different activities that address kinesthetic, tactile, visual, and auditory aspects of learning."

6. **How many years have you been teaching Super Sounds?**

"Eleven years."

7. **How do you teach it?**

"Like I mentioned before, Gail and I use a flannel board to present the pictures to the kids. Neither of us can draw well enough to be effective in that sense. One of us reads the story and the other places the pictures on the flannel board. We ask the kids to identify the pictures, and we label them accordingly. The follow up activities are a crucial part of the program. With my kids, I do things like a collage with the letter/sound we are working on. I also have cut and paste sheets in which kids cut out pictures of items that have the beginning or ending sound of the letter/sound we are working on and paste them to a piece of paper. Another activity I frequently use is a kind of show and tell of items from home that start with the letter of the week. This is strictly on a volunteer basis, but it is nice to get them thinking about the letter/sound outside of school as well. We do sorting activities in which you sort pictures by the initial consonant sound. I also have a kinesthetic activity in which kids pull an object out of a box, and they identify what letter that object begins with. This is a way of reviewing several sounds at once. For example, let's say that they pull a bar of soap out of the SMRP box. They will have to identify which letter/sound begins the word "soap". All of the activities used help the kids to experience the letter/sound using many different learning styles."

8. **Have you ever used any other form of phonetic instruction?**

"All of the activities that I have mentioned may have stemmed from another phonics program, but they all revolve around Super Sounds. They can all be adapted to the Super Sounds program."

9. **How do you approach the different sounds that letters can make?**

"I don't really get into the different sounds too much. However, when the kids are writing, I may explain that in this instance a "c" can sound like a "k". Or something of that nature. It is really more of a first grade thing, and I try not to do too much correcting of the kids' spelling when it comes to things we haven't really addressed yet. If a child is particularly interested or beginning to be aware of the different sounds that letters can make, I am more than happy to begin talking to him/her about it though."

10. **How do you incorporate vowels?**

"In the middle of the year, I tell the kids about vowels. I have a list of the vowels on the wall (see), and I explain that most all of the words in the English language have at least one vowel in them. As development level increases, they use vowels more in their writing. They usually begin to put vowels in words even if they are the wrong letters for the word. They usually begin by putting *A*'s in words, then *E, I, O, U*. Rarely do I see a child use too many *U*'s in Kindergarten. By the middle of the year, the kids have had so much exposure to words that they realize that a vowel belongs in there somewhere. At the end of the year, Super Sounds addresses the vowels. There are two stories for each of the vowels, both the long and the short sound. This

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helps kids place the correct vowel into words that they previously wrote incorrectly. It also prepares them for a more intense look at vowel sounds in first grade."

11. **How does Super Sounds help children in the reading process?**

"They get the opportunity to see, hear, and feel each letter/sound. Because they get so much exposure to the letters and sounds, they are better able to read and write."

12. **Why do you choose to teach this program as opposed to another?**

"I think it is a really good introduction to each letter. It incorporates many aspects of learning to help each child develop at his/her own speed. It accommodates different learning styles. Plus, I see how well it works and how much the kids love it."

Interview

Ms. Sue Pfaltz
Hollymead Elementary School
February 26, 1996

1. **How many years have you been teaching?**

   "22 years"

2. **How long have you taught Kindergarten?**

   "16 years in Kindergarten"

3. **In your classroom, how does the reading process begin?**

"In my classroom, reading and writing are integrated and happen simultaneously. The process normally begins with literature that is read and reread until it is partially memorized. Then it is taken apart and the focus is placed on the words. After the words have been mastered, the focus is placed on the sounds. I use three components: whole language, Language Experience Approach, and phonics.

I begin using big books with very repetitive patterns. The first big book I used, one I wrote and illustrated, was entitled From My Window. We begin by reading and rereading the book, tracking each word as it is read. Words from the story are then generated and used in word banks. Each word bank differs from child to child. We isolate words, both in and out of context until students are able to recognize and read them. The other books I use are from the Wright Book series. We have big books and corresponding little books which can be used in small group activities.

Another method used is the Language Experience Approach (LEA). This is a method of teaching reading and writing through the experiences of the children. An example of this is "Monday Morning News." Every Monday morning, five students are allowed to share a big event or special occasion from their life. It is usually something that happened over the weekend. A record is kept to ensure that each student is given several opportunities to share. The responses of the five students are written in complete sentences on chart paper.

Ex. "Mary said, I have a new baby sister."

The sentences are read and reread throughout the week. As they are read, the words are tracked from left to right. This gets them into the practice of reading. Follow-up activities are also done throughout the week. This time is used to isolate words. It reinforces sight/word vocabulary and one-to-one correspondence, as do big books. At the end of the week, each child is given a copy to take home. They are encouraged to read it to their parents.

The third component of teaching reading is phonetic instruction. The method of phonetic instruction I choose to teach is Super Sounds. This program addresses initial and ending sounds of words.

4. **How were you first introduced to the Super Sounds program?**

"When I arrived at Hollymead Elementary School, a form of the program was already in place."

5. **Have there been any changes since then?**

"Yes. The program was originally used as an articulation tool. It was being taught by speech-language pathologists. Every week, the class would meet with the speech-language pathologist. He/she would read a Super Sound story and focus only on the sound that the letter makes. It was not used in conjunction with words. After the story was read, there were no follow-up activities done by the speech-language pathologist. Also, the actual letter was never written. Eventually the speech-language pathologist stopped doing whole group instruction and the program was dropped. As a result, it was adapted by teachers and used as a tool for teaching phonics."

6. **How many years have you been teaching Super Sounds?**

"16 years"

7. **How do you teach it?**

"I team teach Super Sounds with my colleague, Linda Jernigan. Every Tuesday morning, we gather all of the kids together. A new letter/sound is introduced. Mrs. Jernigan reads the story that accompanies the letter and I illustrate the story as she is reading it. The illustrations are placed on chart paper. After the story is read, the letter/sound is discussed. Children are encouraged to pick illustrations from the story (all of which begin with the letter/sound) and then they are labeled. After all of the pictures are labeled, students are encouraged to generate their own words. Students whose name begins with the Super Sound of the week are asked to stand up. After this initial lesson is completed, I follow up with supporting activities throughout the week. Examples are sound books (each child has one), sound matching activities, writing activities, letter/sound correspondence activities, games, word/picture discriminations, word families, and cooking activities, and many others. The cooking activity is always done on Fridays, and the entree always begins with the Super Sound of the week."

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8. **Have you ever used any other form of phonetic instruction in place of Super Sounds?**

"No, I have not. Super Sounds is the backbone of my personal phonics instruction."

9. **How do you approach the different sounds that letters can make?**

"I am up front with my students. As we are introduced to a new letter and it is an exception, we talk about it as much as possible in a way that they will understand. For example, I might say 'students, C does not always sound like C, sometimes it likes to pretend to be another sound'. By giving them examples of words, they seem to understand as much as can be expected. In this program, the stories address this issue. For example, the C sound is introduced to us by Carl and Katy Crow. Other examples can be seen in other stories."

10. **How do you incorporate vowels?**

"In the Super Sounds program, both long and short vowels are introduced. This is an asset because first grade focuses on vowels and blends. Children in this program will have already had some exposure to both."

11. **How does Super Sounds help children in the reading process?**

"I strongly feel that phonics has to be a part of a reading process. This particular program allows me to teach letter/sound correspondence which is VERY necessary."

12. **Why do you choose to teach this method as opposed to another?**

"I feel like this program really works. I have used it for years and years. Another reason is that the kids love it. It also provides for different styles of learning, especially in its auditory/visual manner. Children learn more easily because they can associate it with something. "

Interview

Mrs. Jan Radcliff
Hollymead Elementary School
February 28, 1996

1. **How long have you been teaching?**

"Eleven years"

2. **How long have you taught Kindergarten?**

"Ten years"

3. **In your classroom, how does the reading process begin?**

"Reading is taught using Whole Language and Super Sounds. From day one children are exposed to language and literature. I focus on familiar words, sight/word vocabulary, name games, and concentration games. I also use Big Books and charts."

4. **How were you first introduced to the Super Sounds Program?**

"My first exposure to the Super Sounds program was as a mother. My son, who is now in his fourth year of college, was taught Super Sounds in Kindergarten. It was very effective for him. I was a full-time mother during his early school years. I went to college and became certified to teach as he got older. I taught Kindergarten at Red Hill Elementary School for five years. During this time, I used the Super Sounds program in my classroom. I was the only teacher using this method at the time. I then came to Hollymead Elementary School where I have been teaching Kindergarten for six years. I have taught using the Super Sounds program during my time here also. "

5. **Have there been any changes since then?**

"Yes. The program was originally used by speech pathologists to enhance articulation. It was part of the speech curriculum. The classroom teacher did not play a part in the program. The speech pathologist would come into the classroom and read a story. There would be no follow-up activities."

6. **How many years have you been teaching Super Sounds?**

"Eleven years"

7. **How do you teach it?**

"Super Sounds is taught every Monday . It is taught by Mrs. Huff (teaching assistant) or by myself. The story is introduced and read. As I read the story, I use a pre-made flip chart of pictures that accompany the story. If Mrs. Huff teaches it, she reads and illustrates as she goes along. Follow-up activities are planned for the entire week. Activities include color sheets, sound sheets, cut and paste activities, cooking projects, handwriting sheets, journal writing, and a dictionary, all of which focus on the Super Sound of the week."

8. **Have you ever used any other form of phonetic instruction in place of Super Sounds?**

"No, I have not."

9. **How do you approach the different sounds that letters can make?**

"The stories accompanying each sound does a good job of including words in the story that may have the same sound but a different spelling. I further address this during whole group instruction as it is encountered."

10. **How do you incorporate vowels?**

"The program addresses both long and short vowels. It is also followed up in the writing activity process."

11. **How does Super Sounds help children in the reading process?**

"When combined with a literature based program, it is very helpful in the reading process. It allows children to recognize and master letter-sound correspondence."

12. **Why do you choose to teach this method as opposed to another?**

"As a parent and as a teacher, I have seen first hand the effectiveness of the program. It was very beneficial for my son, so I wanted it to work for my students, as well. It is also fun for the kids and learning has to be fun. It is sequential and it gets the student set in a routine. It is taught on a specific day and is completed in a five day process."

Interview

Ms. Kendall Young
Murray Elementary School
Speech-Language Pathologist
March 5, 1996

1. **How did you first become involved with the Super Sounds program?**

"I did my student teaching at Venable Elementary School under the supervision of Ms. Jan Hughes in the fall of 1971. After my student teaching experience, I began working as a speech-larguage pathologist in the Madison County School System from 1972 to 1975. During that time, there were no Kindergarten classes. Several first grade teachers were concerned about the clarity of some students' pronunciation. At this time, I was introduced to a program called High Hat by Goldman and Lynch researchers. This program addresses auditory discrimination and articulation. The High Hat program is primarily a sound program that uses a puppet to introduce individual sounds. A flip-book story and a picture accompanied each sound. The program uses magnetic letters to teach sound manipulation. Vowels as well as digraphs are introduced to make words. Jan Hughes was also using the High Hat program during this time. She and I were in touch over the years, and we often discussed the implementation and effectiveness of the program. One day I saw Jan at the grocery store, and we began discussing some concerns we were having with the High Hat program. We agreed that we were not completely satisfied with the High Hat program. Speech-language pathologists could not track the stories because there were not any drawings to accompany the progression of the story. Also, the stories were not as interactive as Jan would have liked them to be. As a result of these concerns, Jan created the idea of a new program. It was inspired by the High Hat program and her commitment to speech improvement.

The new program was called Super Sounds. The program featured an association of a specific sound with a picture and a hand signal. The stories were both creative and entertaining. The stories were comprised of words that began with the sound that was being taught. By illustrating the key words in the stories, speech-language pathologists could easily track the story from left to right to easily correspond to the direction of print. Jan wrote the majority of the stories but the Albemarle County speech-language pathologists got together to write the long vowel and digraph stories. We wrote Victor Vampire as well. There was concern about negative character names for some of the sound characters. Consequently, we changed the names of several characters in order to avoid offending students. For example, Bad Bobby was changed to Bad Boy, and Nasty Nelly was changed to New Nelly. Several follow-up activities were used by speech-language pathologist at this time. I

used activities such as sound pockets, auditory closure, sound deletion, and file folders. "

2. **Do you think that the Super Sounds program is effective?**

"There are many aspects of the Super Sounds program that make it effective. The order that the sounds are taught is very important. The most distinctive and high frequency sounds were presented first. The order of the sounds is also based on common sound substitution of students with speech problems. For example, they tend to substitute the *P* sound for the *F* sound. We address this by introducing the similar sounds consecutively to make a clear distinction between the sounds. The Super Sounds program was valuable for me because I could have weekly contact with students. It provided the opportunity for diagnostic teaching. It allowed speech-language pathologists to work closely with teachers to help students with mild to severe speech-language difficulties by providing some improvement strategies. Because I taught Super Sounds during whole group instruction , there was a smooth transition to pull-out programs for students with speech-language difficulties. I was aware of information about the student because I had seen them in the classroom; therefore, I could be more specific about students' needs. I acquainted teachers with auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic follow-up activities. "

3. **Why did speech-language pathologists stop teaching Super Sounds?**

"We were asked to discontinue teaching Super Sounds by our supervisor in 1983 because our caseloads were large. At this time, the program was adopted by early childhood educators. Teachers stressed both letter and sound recognition. They added several components that advanced the Super Sounds program beyond its original purpose. I still teach a version of Super Sounds to individual students with speech needs. I now combine certain sounds. It is also based on the Lindamood Auditory Discrimination In-Depth program which focuses on phonemic awareness. I think that the current implementation of the Super Sounds program is a valuable tool for students in a whole language curriculum. "